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UNCLAS PRAGUE 001533

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: AVIAN FLU: CZECHS DON'T HAVE THEIR DUCKS IN A ROW

1. (SBU) Summary: There is no evidence of Avian Flu in the Czech Republic. However, due to a lack of political leadership and a delayed reaction to the potential pandemic, the government only has sufficient medical supplies and facilities to deal with a mild outbreak. A larger outbreak would overwhelm the resources and abilities of the fractious Ministry of Health and Czech health care providers. Post is prepared to care for all American employees, American dependents, and locally hired staff. Post is looking into the possibility of procuring additional Tamiflu for family members of locally hired employees. Consular and public affairs sections are spreading critical information to AmCits to ensure their safety and the warden system is ready for activation. End Summary.

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Fractured Host Government Preparedness  
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2. (SBU) As of October 21, the Ministry of Agriculture imposed two bans intended to help minimize the spread of any virus: a ban on gathering large numbers (term undefined) of birds together for exhibits, competition, or breeding; and a nonsensical ban on pigeon racing. On a more encouraging note, the State Veterinarian Office has asked for the 14 regional veterinary centers to hold educational seminars for poultry workers by the end of October, has two emergency destruction centers, and has an up-to-date plan to respond to any infectious diseases.

3. (SBU) The Ministry of Health, which is wracked with internal struggles and has gone through six Ministers in as many years, is doing little to respond to Avian Flu concerns. The Czech Republic has set aside funds to order approximately 2 million doses of avian flu vaccine, which will be produced in-country (note: the population of Czech Republic is 10 million, about 1 million of which reside in Prague). However, clinical tests are not due to begin until next year. The government claims to have 600,000 doses of Tamiflu already in stock, and has promised to purchase more, while at the same time banning the sale of Tamiflu to the public. The acting Minister of Health, David Rath, who was only appointed on October 20, is rather dismissive of Avian Flu concerns, stressing that "people are far more at risk of dying in a road accident."

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Post Readiness  
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4. (SBU) Post held an EAC meeting October 25 on Avian Flu. Post will have sufficient supplies of Tamiflu for all employees (Americans and FSNs) and American dependents in December, and is currently looking into the purchase of additional doses to cover the family members of locally hired employees. The Embassy website is being updated to include information for AmCits about the flu and where they can get medical treatment in Prague. If there were to be a substantial outbreak, medical facilities in the capital would likely be insufficient and AmCits who reside in the area or are quarantined during a visit due to an outbreak would be subject to the provisional plans of the government, which at this point are uncertain.

5. (SBU) Comment: While the Ministry of Health does have a pandemic plan in place and has ready access to military resources in the event of an Avian Flu outbreak, hospitals that post is in contact with, are unfamiliar with the pandemic response plan. Post continues to monitor the government preparedness.

CABANISS